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## Documentary Narratives: A Reading of Japanese American Internment Camps in Nakamura's *Treadmill*

Mahmoud Ibrahim Ibrahim Radwan\*

Faculty of Education, Department of Foreign Languages (English Section ), Tanta University

### Abstract:

This study undertakes a critical examination of Hiroshi Nakamura's *Treadmill: A Documentary Novel* (1996) in light of the varied conceptualizations of documentary narratives. *Treadmill* is a testimonial account dealing with the physical and psychic traumatic afflictions of the Japanese American in internment camps during World War II. Despite its uniqueness in many respects, this text has not garnered the critical attention it deserves. It is the first novel written during the period of Japanese and Japanese-Americans incarceration. For fifty years, it has been sitting on the shelf of the National Archives in Record Group 210. I argue that Nakamura ably manipulates the stratagems of documentary narrative freeing himself from the constraints of the conclusive interpretation of historical data. He presents truths as inconclusive rendering sundry interpretations.

The key common dominator of all present-day documentary fiction (and possibly all documentary narratives) is the ongoing doubt in the official truth and a frequent critique of the establishment. (Flis, *Factual* 198)

**Introduction:**

In their theorization of the documentary novel, scholarly critiques are preoccupied with conceptualizing the shifting ground of a genre that resists easy categorization. As distinctly separate from standard fiction and non-fiction, Mas'ud Zavarzadeh describes the documentary novel as an enactment of a "yes-and-no situation" (227) which displays its characteristic features through a "fictual" bi-referential mode. He depicts the 'facts' presented as 'mythopoeic': they are arranged in a way that enables the documentary novelist to get to the bottom of the situation described even when the process of discovery reveals that there is no final truth or definite answer. Zavarzadeh further argues that a bipolar approach of fictional and/or factual is no longer capable of dealing with the current eerie realities or the fictional framework that is verisimilar to everyday experience. He thus envisions the 'non-fiction novel' as a third category in which the factual and fictional negotiate in an interstitial space of experience to create a new hybrid discourse that blurs the distinctions of fact and fiction (56). Accordingly, in documentary novel, there is a dramatic interplay between the real and the textual in the sense that truth-claims are produced through narrative strategies, and calls for a pact between the writer and the reader regarding the veracity or inaccuracy of the account.

For Barbra Foley, the propagation of the tradition of merging fantasy and realism denotes neither an obliteration of boundaries nor a perception of the text as the sum of binary generic distinctions. It purports to render "reality by means of agreed-upon conventions of fictionality, while grafting onto its fictive past some kind of additional claim to empirical validation" (Foley, *Telling* 25-6). Along these lines, narration in documentary fiction revolves around the reciprocity of the experiential world and the author's imaginary constructs, as well as subjective readings that mobilize fictive technicalities. Thus, Foley's theorization of the documentary novel presents it as fiction, albeit an indisputable leaning towards nonfiction. The reader is thereby pulled in two opposing directions: the documentary and the fictional.

The shift from documentary to fictional and concomitant friction and tension contributes to the aesthetic appeal of the form <sup>(1)</sup>. Probing into the fluctuating nature of the factual and mimetic discourses, Mikhail Bakhtin indicates that the growth of literature does not take place within static borders since borders themselves are constantly changing (Dialogic 33). Leonora Flis, thus, classifies the documentary novel as a genre that breaks

with “the conventional narrative boundaries” (*Factual* 51). In this regard, established genres of non-fictional historical events, travel narratives and memoir intermingle, and the artificial realm is re-envisioned and reconstructed on the basis of factual materials.

In light of such premises/postulations, it seems to be a grueling enterprise to formulate a determinative or uniform definition of the documentary novel. This, in turn, has resulted in “terminological inconsistencies” of the genre under various guises such as “nonfiction novel,” “faction,” or “historiographic metafiction or historical narratives” (Flis, *Factual* 1-2). Flis argues that Alex Haley uses the term “faction” to describe his work *The Roots* written in 1976. She refers to Linda Hutcheon’s view about the inclination towards metafictionality and provisionality as the focal point of the congruence between non-fictional novel and historiographic metafiction (*Factual* 57). She also points out that more extrapolations evolved when the term ‘testimonio’ appeared in Latin America Significantly (*Factual* 57). Nancy Pedri equates literary journalism and documentary novel, and theorizes that the union of testimony and argument suggests that both historical and fictional truths are indispensable for an epistemological undertaking of the documentary fiction (62)

In fact, speculations on the significance and complexity of documentary/ testimonial discourses of traumatic events move in different directions. John Beverley focuses on the intentionality of the narrator in affirming individuality as a subject that makes public the private and intolerable pain, thus sharing and communicating a detailed testimony of traumatic events that are either witnessed or experienced (13-14). Communities embarking upon documenting their traumatic stories are motivated by an urgent drive of voicing their marginalization, subalternity, repression, incarceration, destitution, resistance and struggle for survival.

Documentary narratives treat such communities collectively rather than as a single family or a group of individuals, given the contemporary human situation that espouses the collective consciousness in order to supplant the subjective individual truth. Furthermore, collective cognizance of truths proposes different exegeses of the same historic events (Pedri, *Factual* 51). In other words, documentary narratives allow the author to bring to light controversial interpretations of chronicled occurrences, hence indicating the now household belief there are no longer absolute standards to differentiate the true from the fictitious worlds. Diane Middlebrook regards “imaginative interventions” in the documentary novel as the author’s strategy “to fill gaps in documented events and to create plausible inner lives for the protagonists in significant historical situations” (48).

On her part, Leigh Gilmore undertakes to elucidate the intricacy of ‘trauma’ and the documentary testimonial project of representing the self. Testimony requires “subjects to confess [and] to bear witness” (7). For her, testimony comprises an intersection of factual and fictive realms in such a

way that occulted truths are divulged and a congruent narrative is created. Nevertheless, the authors' interpolation in historical records is, for the most part, governed by a commitment to the truth that is marked by incessant re-evaluation. The reason is that, "the empirical reality itself engendered a feeling of incredulity" (Hegerfeldt 215-16). Similarly, Flis uses Jean Baudrillard's term "simulacrum" (*Factual* 51) to describe this state of being in which everything is dubious and debatable.

As a matter of fact, times of uncertainty provide fertile grounds for the documentary narratives to flourish. Zavarzadeh observes that the modal duality of the documentary narrative "offers a double vision of the bizarre fictuality of contemporary reality" (67). John Hollowell, likewise, reckons that writers turned to the documentary genre because the events reported daily "became more fantastic than the fictional visions of even our best novelists" (3). To substantiate this argument, Laura Browder expounds that the allure of documentary narratives is connected with an exigent need to capture, in words or pictures, the emblematic scenes of the crises, to help audiences understand the nature of the problems faced by the nation (2).

Correspondingly, there is a shared agreement between the reader/audience and writer "about the conditions under which texts can be composed and comprehended" (Foley, *Telling* 40). Ethically considered, the value of the documentary novel resides in thrusting the reader to contemplate alternative versions of a historical event. Here, the reader is stimulated to experience what Bruce Spiegelman calls "possible discovery" (qtd. in Pedri, *Rendering* 462) revisiting various, and equally plausible, readings of the same history, thus subverting historiographical fixed readings.

Elaborating on the problematic relationship between the text, the reader and the author, Sven Rossel proposes three taxonomies of 'documentarism;' namely, examining the document as "the very work in question;" reworking documents as "the source of inspiration" or as a strategy "to enhance the veracity of the narrative" while "undertaking documentation as a façade" (4-5). In the process, Rossel is alert to two factors: the differentiation between documentation as an aesthetic ploy on the one hand, and the change that occurs in the role of the author apropos the concept chosen, on the other. Pedri's cogitations assign similar assumptions underscoring the implication of documentation as a "reality shared by author and reader prior to any written or visual artifact; a reality that can never be empirically known or truthfully reproduced," (*Factual* 30) and that can be perceived in multiple approaches.

The aforementioned theoretical speculations provide the springboard for the subsequent analysis of Nakamura's *Treadmill*. I argue that, in *Treadmill*, Nakamura ably manipulates the defining features of the

documentary narrative, mainly; intertextuality, plurality of truths, irony, prototext, testimonial apparatuses and problematized closure that frees the text from the constraints of conclusive interpretations of historical data. In this manner, Nakamura deconstructs epistemological notions of grand narratives<sup>(2)</sup> and presents truths as inconclusive encompassing sundry interpretations. Nakamura thus shifts the text from the strict realm of historiography to the self-reflexive world of pluralistic realities.

### **Nakamura's *Treadmill*: A Pioneering Documentation of Camp Trauma**

In fact, *Treadmill* acquires inimitability in the sense that it is foremost the only novel written about the factual life circumstances and policies practiced in the camps and the Japanese and Japanese Americans internees' reactions to them during the World War II. In a compendious article on Nakamura's *Treadmill*, Peter Suzuki provides the rationale for identifying it as the 'premier' novel of the wartime camps. He states, "It is a literary product which constitutes its own [documentary] genre" and adds that it is "a powerful [testimony] to the spirit of the 110,000 unjustly incarcerated"(Desertification474).

Nakamura's investigational treatment of the Japanese American trauma and testimonies in relation to internment distinguishes him from traditional historiographers on the one hand and former inmates on the other. For the most part, pressures against textual production on internment in mainstream overpower the presence of the inmates. Greg Robinson argues that the inmates are subdued by either "internal and external pressure to hold their silence about their wartime experience" (48). In contrast to subservient inmates, Nakamura reveals an unswerving perseverance to present a detailed account of the distressing conditions in incarceration camps. In his introduction to *Treadmill*, Suzuki notes that Nakamura was armed with all the aptitudes that might enable him to craft a novel that depict camp life of the internees accurately: "the drive, patience, perseverance, tenacity, and insight" (i).

Moreover, Suzuki pays tribute to Nakamura's resolve to abide by objectivity manifested in his unflinching look at diverse aspects of camp life: "the good, the bad, and the ugly, anxieties, suspicions, cynicisms, and passions brought out by camp life" (i). Commenting on the impartial exposition of the narrative, Suzuki remarks Nakamura's exactitude in encapsulating the zeitgeist in the internment camp through "vignettes, views, opinions and attitudes on a myriad of things and people, such as: the chasm separating Niseis from their parental generation and ... the Kibei"<sup>(3)</sup> (Desertification 471). In other respects, Nakamura scrutinizes with an ethnographic eyes "health and sanitary conditions... romancing among young people; reasons for internal dissonance and divisiveness ... the meaning of patriotism, loyalty, injustices... [and] race relations" (Desertification 471-72). Consequently, Nakamura goes beyond the fictional

trajectory referring to interrelations that could be measured objectively via keeping the link to the historical world.

In *Treadmill*, the Noguchis, a Japanese American family, occupy central stage. The novel revolves around its angst-ridden life in Salinas Assembly Center, Salinas, California; Camp II of the Poston Relocation Center, Parker, Arizona; and Tule Lake Segregation Center, Newell, California where Nakamura himself spent the war years along with his family. In his preamble to the novel, Suzuki argues that the tale of The Noguchis “transcends what happened to a particular Japanese-American family to the extent that it touches on all those who were interned” (iv). After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (1941), all citizens of Japanese origin have been interned. They were classified as ‘intimidating dangerous aliens.’ John Lesesne DeWitt, the administrator of the internment program, repeatedly told newspapers that “A Jap's a Jap” and testified to Congress that “there is no way to determine their loyalty ... [since] American citizenship does not necessarily determine loyalty... But we must worry about the Japanese all the time until he is wiped off the map” (qtd. in Smith and Hung 86). David Lowman, a former National Security Agency (NSA) operative, vindicates incarceration the same way. He proclaims that “disloyalty” among some individual Japanese Americans could legitimize detaining “120,000 people, including infants, the elderly, and the mentally ill” (Hatamiya 106). Judged as disloyal, Mr. Noguchi, Issei (first-generation Japanese immigrants), is interned and Mrs. Noguchi along with the family's three teenaged Nisei (American born Japanese) children, Teru, Tad, and Sally are sent to the Tule Lake segregation center at the Poston camp. The story of their incarceration is narrated through the consciousness of Teru.

In his preface, Nakamura succinctly captures a live portrait of camp life and its privations; given the fact that the American officials have not compensated the Japanese Americans for the loss of their possessions,

We were herded into confinement as a demonstration of *loyalty*. Yet we were denied the rights of loyal men. Not understanding why nor knowing where... we stumbled wearily through shocking heat and stifling dust - without liberty, without home, with uncertain future. We cheered in darkness on the dregs - of disillusionment, of bitterness, of hopelessness; we cheated, we lied, we were honest, we were brave, we stood on the hot burning sands. (qtd. in Suzuki, Premier 175)

The surrounding is teeming with confusing contradictions to the extent that the internees are uncertain about their future and cannot comprehend why they are confined and how to react. Teru writes to George, her former boyfriend, saying, “We don't know how long it is going to last, the thought of having to endure more is almost unbearable” (53). Connecting attributes

of incongruous implications such as “cheated, lied and honest” aggravates the perplexity and mystification about their place in the community. When “cheer” is inserted amidst this desolate milieu, it elicits a highly sardonic effect. Its connotations are at odds with the author’s traumatic vision of camp life where privation permeates dispossessing internees of physical freedom, privacy, food, speech and all certainty about their position.

This leads me to the consideration of the component of ontological uncertainty, another conspicuous hallmark in documentary narratives. According to Brian McHale, “Intractable epistemological uncertainty becomes at a certain point ontological plurality or instability: push epistemological questions far enough and they ‘tip over’ into ontological questions” (11). Documentary fiction shifts epistemological uncertainty to ontological one, and problems of knowing to problems of being: characters and readers are no longer interested in knowing or perceiving the fictional world with its open interchanges of testimony and argument, but interrogate instead the construction of the identity and the being of the world they have entered. Situated among multitudes of alternatives, the world characters and readers enter is characterized by ontological uncertainties expressed as “a multitude of truths and discourses between which there are no clearly determinable lines” (Matajc, Introduction 2).

In an attempt to construct a sense of lucidity and coherence in such a ‘fictual’ world, the writer imposes aesthetic structure over a continuum of factual information in such a way that it carries, as Kenneth Reed indicates, a fictive ambiance (84). This intertwined construction veers the reader away from the conclusive truth of the traditional historical novel in order to be engaged in an investigation into the inconclusive truth in the documentary novel.

### **Polyphonic Truths: “Ludic Truth” vs. Ultimate Truth**

McHale’s “ontological uncertainty” concurs with what Roland Barthes calls “ludic truth.” Barthes explains, “To open the text ... is ... to gain acknowledgment that there is ... a ludic truth ... [a] “game” [that] must not be understood here as a distraction, but as a piece of work”(qtd. in *Rustle* 31). In other words, reading involves spontaneous and undirected playfulness with the assumption that there is no ultimate truth of reading. This proposition urges us to think of truth as utterly contingent and temporarily situated in the living relation “between the reader and the text, in the play-work, performance of reading” (Game and Metcalfe 142). Jean Baudrillard likewise notes, “truth, reference and objective causes have ceased to exist” (3). In narratives of events, one takes into account individual perception and interpretation as well as the author’s tendency to be selective. Significantly, the documentary novel embraces “ludic truth” and the rejection of “the fixity of language” especially as Mehdi Ghasemi puts it, “language is itself pregnant with a galaxy of devices that offer optionalism of meanings and pluralism of interpretations” (5). Openness and

multiplicity of interpretations are prototypical characteristics of the documentary novel in the sense that, as Jim Meyer states, it “contains many implicatures” (7) which prompt the reader to think of many propositions that may be weakly present.

It is noteworthy that along the lines of Bakhtin's thought, the documentary novel, on the one hand, grapples with the notions of “certitude” excluding “one-sided or dogmatic seriousness” and forbidding “any single point of view, any single polar extreme of life or thought, to be absolutized” (*Problems* 165 ); on the other hand, it champions “heteroglossia,” “inclusiveness,” “dialogism” and the insistence on “experimenting with the social, discursive, and narrative asymmetries” (*Dialogic* xxviii). Here, the conceptualization of the dialogic correlation between the text and the reader portends intertextuality pointing up reader-text relationship rather than author-text. In this respect, documentary novel proposes that there is no single meaning in the world and that truth is not constructed abstractly from the dominant perspective of the author. The polyphonic truth at the core of the genre accentuates the dialogic relationship between the reader and the text transforming it into a writerly text <sup>(4)</sup>. The author thus seems to be extraneous to the textual viewpoint since as Catherine Belsey notes, “the production of meaning by the work of reading the text constitutes the raw material to be transformed by the critic” (139).

In *Treadmill*, Nakamura frees himself from the constraints of the ultimate truths pre-sentencing instead a form of ‘ludic’ truth behind the trauma of the Japanese American inhuman incarceration. He deploys ludic elements associated with playfulness and the reader's role as producer rather than consumer of the text in an attempt to create dialogism between him and the text. Therefore, Nakamura's underlying theme is to remove officials' playful euphemistic layers that veil the truth. Suzuki contends, “Despite the seemingly clear-cut nature of many War Relocation Authority policies, there were always *two sides to each of them* . . . they required great thought and deliberation on the part of the people in deciding which to follow, and when . . . choices were made” (Introduction iv, *emphasis mine*). Furthermore, there were no appeasing solutions as the choices themselves generated unpredicted problems and the internees were forever facing crises.

Suzuki's observation calls to attention the nebulous condition that saturates the very fabric of the novel. Early in chapter two, Nakamura underscores the process of propagation to carry out ‘relocation’ manipulating a milieu in which “people were too ready to believe anything” (16). The narrator expands on the marketing of the Japanese American ‘gullible’ tendencies to believe the official allegations through “the rumor of the discharged houseboy who had vengefully threatened the *understanding*



employer who had just promised him his job back after the war, “After the war is over, you work for me” (16). The story has been told three times about different persons, although in fact, it is one single story about a person who “had told it to a cousin” (16). The story engages the reader in an epistemological quest in search of the most reliable and verifiable version of the story. In this way, the reader becomes an integral part in the textual analysis process. Accordingly, the reader is invited to share in “the historical or sociological inquiries and is encouraged to take a skeptical look at the investigative process itself” (22) as presumed by Stecher-Hansen.

Later in the novel, magnification of the officials’ ‘humanitarian’ motives coincides with a visit of a ‘dignitary. He told the internees that they are ‘lucky’ to be in “relocation” camps since “war will last seven or ten years” and “the cost of living is going up outside and it gets tougher each day.” He goes further and adds that they are to be envied because at the end of the war, “[they] will be better off than those outside” (89). The observation of Jiro, Teru’s boyfriend, following this encounter unveils the awareness that American officials are just marketing for ‘relocation.’ He states, “We were told that coming here was a patriotic duty. May be, some of THEM came to this hell-hole as a patriotic duty too” (113). The sardonic tone is underlined; the narrative “first asserts the Japanese American belonging to the United States through the Noguchis’ relation to the US soil” (Wald 88); and then, it proceeds to reveal a process through which their legal citizenship is dismissed. Furthermore, such ‘relocation’ is declared as a “patriotic duty.” The situation becomes even more ridiculous when the government demands that the internees prove they are ‘worthy’ of attaining those rights which are rightfully theirs since they are American citizens. The instability of Japanese American citizenship is presented as fluctuating as the weather. Early in the novel, the Issei community members verify that the Nisei’s citizenship is “only good for fair weather” (8); one cannot count on it.

In fact, Nakamura’s “foregrounding of contradictions” (Foley, Telling 235) is one of the compelling methods of the documentary novel. One incident after the other constitutes evidence of the officials’ illogicalities and iniquitousness. In this respect, Linda Craft argues that exposing the officials’ inconsistencies help deconstruct the mainstream historiographic discourse that perpetuates ‘otherness’ as inferior to the ‘self’ (19). Consequently, *Treadmill* calls for a revision of the officials’ putative allegations that, as Aviezer Tucker states, are mainly “affected by moral and aesthetic values, by the affiliations, political biases and perspectives of the historians who write them” (9)

Such prejudiced interpretations concretize in Michelle Malkin’s defense of internment. She offers “a defense of the most reviled wartime policies in American history: the evacuation, relocation, and internment of people of Japanese descent during World War II” (xiii). For her, the

processes are measures taken for the sake of the national security during World War II. However, Tetsuden Kashima argues that chastising a group on the ground of “religious affiliation, national origin, ethnicity, race, or other social categories rather than on individual behavior” (Introduction 15) engenders despotic measures that use “national security” and “military necessity” as vindication of any atrocity.

Unmistakably, the American officials tend to play on such hollow phrases to market the process as an acceptable alternative diverting the attention away from the violation of the Japanese American human rights. Commenting on the circumlocution and periphrasis of the U.S. government, Kashima notes that during wartimes, “euphemisms” such as “‘assembly centers,’ ‘relocation camps,’ and ‘evacuation’” are disseminated to “mask the unpleasantness” (*Judgment* 20) of forcing people in order to move out of their homes. Within war milieu, claims of “Justice, humanity, human progress had been shrugged off in a second like an ill-fitting mantle” (18) as remarked by the narrator.

The playfulness of officials maxes out with their implementation of what the Hungarian-born mathematician John von Neumann label as the “Game theory.” It is, as Tara Fickle explains, “like poker, forc(ing) players to make decisions on the basis of incomplete information about both the strength of the other players’ ‘cards’ and their intentions” (Narrative 429). American government authorized and marketed such a theory during the Cold War. Fickle adds, “The Eisenhower Administration explicitly utilized game theory to determine American responses to the threat of Soviet nuclear exchange” (Narrative 429). In essence, it was essentially a means of “prevent(ing) nuclear exchange by conceptualizing the cold war as a game, and by playing this game according to specific rational strategies” (Belletto 333). In *The Ascent of Man*, Jacob Bronowski, who worked with von Neumann during World War II, reminisces Neumann’s explication of the theory; he states, “Real life consists of bluffing, of little tactics of deception, of asking yourself what is the other man going to think I mean to do ... that is what games are about in my theory” (324).

Indeed, in many respects *Treadmill* is a case history of game theory’s “real life” power plotted against the Japanese American internees in the name of moral or political ideals. Within such a gaming world, the only reinforced image created for the Asians is that of “hard workers rather than exuberant players” (Fickle, Narrative 430). *Treadmill* demonstrates two types of gaming: the literal played by the internees and the official playfulness that lurks beneath. On the one hand, the internees themselves are engaged in literal games of playing bridge, baseball fields and tomato gardens that they themselves have erected. On the other, there is the official gaming always concealed under ‘humanitarian’ facades and euphemistic

slogans.

The detention of the father, Mr. Noguchi, adds to the gaming the officials tend to market to the Americans. Arresting the father without criminal charges is professed to be for his own good. One of the FBI agents explains to Teru that they are only trying to protect her father. On his part, the narrator elaborates on such notion of playfulness confuting its claims, "Her father's record was clear. He had come to America as a student... . He had then set himself up as a respected member ... through hard work... [H]e was influential in the Japanese Association ... because of his college education" (9). Yet, Noguchi's well established character in the community as a highly cultivated individual does not ensure any protection. The officials are mainly concerned with exonerating the detention of Asians at any cost. The equivocation the FBI agent pursues to interrogate Teru unveils his real intention and galvanizes her into shouting out: "What are you trying to do? ... to make me say something that isn't true?" (9). These words disclose the dire need to revise the narratives of the officials. The narrator's words about Sally further illustrate the gaming of the American officials; he avows, "Once stopped by a motor cop, she is terrified" (11) because the cop seems to be ignorant of the difference between an alien and a citizen and insists on locking her up.

The officials' tricky gaming instigates the reader to delve deeper into pivotal historic issues raised by the narrative; namely, Pearl Harbor (1941), 'evacuation' and the release of loyalty questionnaire. Such issues stimulate the Japanese American creeping feelings of trepidation and prod the reader to settle for varying responses and views.

As regards Pearl Harbor (1941), Japan launched an attack against the American Fleet to prevent it from intervention into the Japanese Empire and World War II. Nonetheless, the attack brought America into the war. The American officials' claims of the war, as revealed by the narrator, are subsumed under the phenomena of 'ludology'<sup>(5)</sup>. It is alleged that "war was fought for ... Oppressed minorities. America always cried out so much about democracy, Christian principles. The Four Freedoms" (18) of speech, of worship, from want and from fear. Yet, the war was definitely conducive to the repression of thousands of innocent of Japanese ancestry.

In *Treadmill*, the characters adopt diverse attitudes towards Pearl Harbor event. Teru listens stunned to the news of bombing Pearl Harbor hoping that "the black planes were really sent by reactionary admirals without orders from Tokyo" (22). The narrator makes his comments heard stating that war between Japan and America would be a disaster since "America was the only country [Teru] knew and could call her own but Japan was the place where people like her mother and father came from" (22). On his part, Mr. Noguchi comments on the disillusionment of war. He observes, "hate and war go together. People must be taught to hate and fear before they can be persuaded to kill, and there will be a tremendous effort to

mobilize that hate and fear because the leaders will be a little hesitant at first to rely too much on making this another war of ideals" (23). Another view is voiced by Bill Yamada addressing George, "We're citizens. The same as everybody else" (23). George replies, "They can't single us out as long as we live up to our citizenship. We'll have our rights as citizens, of course, but I'm thinking of the people around here. People get pretty hysterical in war time" (23). With a similar uncertainty, Jiro states that right after Pearl Harbor, he told his boss that he didn't go for the 'dastardly treacherous' business because he was "Japanese and had some sympathies for Japan even though [he] volunteered and would fight as well" (142). The oscillation culminates in the perplexing question of an officer after Pearl Harbor: "if [the Japanese Americans] would shoot their own fathers if they discovered they were Japanese spies and were escaping. When some refused to answer and others said no, the officer got mad and said that in the Civil War, father killed son and brother killed brother" (142).

'Evacuation' adds to the Japanese American traumas staged by unscrupulous playfulness of the officials. Ironically, the officials regard it as indicative of the Japanese American loyalty to America, although it entails the loss of homes, holdings and liberty. Therefore, the narrator manages to make the reader distrustful of evacuation portraying it suspiciously as "part of a larger scheme to force [Japanese Americans] completely out of California" (62). He also handled the available material in a way that shows how the American government indiscriminately hurled "charges of dishonesty, disloyalty, and undesirability [and] hired a propagandist at 10,000 dollars a year to lobby in Washington for banishment of Japanese ... [who] were bitter rivals of lettuce growing interests" (62). The narrator further expounds, "A Chamber of Commerce representative was sent to the Middle West to warn against allowing any Japanese to settle in their midst" (62). Furthermore, an American farmer wrote a letter and sent copies to all the local newspapers stating gruffly: "We don't want Japs in California. They're no good.... I had to live next to one for five years" (62). As a result, officials recast Japanese Americans as suspect aliens penalized by being confined behind barbed wire.

The loyalty questionnaire is another discernable occurrence of conflicting approaches that typifies one of the traumatic crucial moments in Japanese American incarcerations. It is an official document given to all internees above the age of seventeen known as the Leave Clearance Form and euphemistically called 'registration.' Its main concern was to define what the Japanese Americans are forced to do under the yoke of internment, not to mention their deprivation of all freedoms. As a result, a controversy erupted in the camps due to two specific questions namely; question number "27." Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on

combat duty wherever ordered?" (132). In respect of question "28." Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power, or organization?" (132). Being a fusion of the "the Orient and the Occident" (Takaki, 224), the Nisei have to side with either Japan, the homeland of their parents and their heritage, or with America with which they identify, albeit it is discriminating and they are not able to fully assimilate because of their Japanese ancestry.

The narrator proposes a multitude of diverse stances about the questionnaire without deciding or showing which one is right to contest the official monolithic interpretations of history. He indicates that the response has been unexpected when practically all answered no to question 27, whereas fully half of the early registrants answered in the negative to question 28. Then, "The older ones went straight home with the decisions. The younger ones gathered uncertainly by the block manager's office to compare notes and take comfort in having done what the others had done" (138). Additionally, the Kibei "answered no because their country is really Japan after all, Nisei could easily answer yes, yet some of them answered no to both questions" (132). Obvious inconclusiveness pervades among the Japanese Americans regarding loyalty questionnaire which is presented as "an exercise which becomes an end in itself" (Fickle, Dilemma 753). The narrator explains that people are assigned to four categories: First, the 'no yes group' who refused to "come right out and show disloyalty to America by default and yes they didn't want to be caught up in any future draft;" secondly, the 'yes-yes group' who "refused to be tricked by the army and lay [themselves] open for prosecution;" thirdly, the 'no-no group,' who "still clung fast to [their] constitutional rights and a few were simply draft dodgers;" fourthly, the group who "didn't know what to do" (179-180). Eventually, conflicting ramifications evoke several scenes of misgivings about the present and suffuse the internees with scruples about the future, the path to follow and the appropriate decision to be made.

Subsequently, the narrator shifts from general groups to specific unstipulated individual response to intensify the state of having mixed feelings and contradictory stances. He explicates that Mr. Noguchi has told his family that it would be better to evade troubles and go the government 'camp.' Mrs. Motoyama and everybody had been so insistent that if the Noguchis abide this advice, they will be "locked up for the duration of war" (17). Teru "hadn't wanted to go against her father's request ... but ... she wasn't sure herself which was the right thing to do. Either way left the future pretty much in the air" (17). Teru therefore undergoes double consciousness <sup>(6)</sup> regarding responsibilities and inclinations of Issei "Japanese parents" and duties as an American "citizen." Mr. Hosoda, an

internee, undergoes the same negotiations. He cries out because he cannot tell his sons and daughters what to do. He further argues, "They talked it over earlier and have decided to relocate as soon as Kenji volunteers. As for ourselves, we are old and would be a handicap to them. So we intend to stay in a relocation center" (132).

Jiro has disclosed the internal and external pressures that lie beneath the ambivalence over the questionnaire. He states that "to answer one way or the other ... doesn't mean that those of us who answered the same way ... [have] the same reasons" (177) because there must have been hundreds of impelling factors like "family ties, money, fear of public opinion, brother already in the army, and one's contacts which were the real deciding factors" (177-78). Significantly, Tom Itaya's words to Sammy are expressive of Japanese American fluctuation. He professes, "Everybody is signing no-yes this morning and getting away with it. You do that, too." Then, he adds, "Most fellows are signing no-yes. Looks like the smart thing to do" and unravels other stories of "browbeating and long persuasion when anyone tried to answer no to the loyalty question" (138).

Explicating the Japanese American fickle presentiment, a young Nisei woman remarks that her husband is Issei and they went on the same day to register. She answered "no-no," whereas her husband has answered "yes." She comments "It was funny because I'd expected him to answer no from the way he's been talking and he thought I'd answer yes because I always used to fight with him about it" (197). It is remarkably sarcastic since the characters' vacillation compels them to abide by the rules of the "game theory." They do not depend on their ideological ethics in deciding which path to follow. They build their decisions on expectations. There is a fundamental divergence between their choices and their convictions. It implies that they take comfort in doing "what the others had done" (138).

Manifestly, so muddled are the Japanese Americans that they undergo conflicting mindsets towards their familial desires as Japanese Americans and their commitment to the welfare of America that "*was not for [them]*" (134) as put by Mr. Yamada who had been hustled into internment without a chance to say more than two words of goodbye to his wife. In this regard, Nakamura's choice of the narrator denotes an example of the "negotiations between two representational scales: the "big picture" of American history and the "microcosm" of a Japanese family" (Fickle, *Serious* 32). Using Gérard Genette's terms, the narrative voice is "heterodiegetic" (70) and the perspective is "zero focalization" (67) because the narrator is not a character in the story but in a way he hovers above it and is able to give us information of considerable detail about everything. In view of this, *Treadmill*, as a documentary novel, necessitates a first person narrative perspective since its autobiographical nature

centered on Teru Noguchi who shares the name and a number of historical parallels with Nakamura's younger sister. Yet, Nakamura uses the third person omniscient narration to create a large space for multiplicity of voices through collections of witnesses of varied generations mainly; Issei, Nisei and Kibeito supplement the testimonial dimensions. In this comportment, Nakamura "does not offer single perspective of an individual picture of reality: "that of the writer" (Flis, *Factual* 27). Instead, the narrative unfolds different perspectives that challenge the dominant ideology.

Indeed, diversity of views toward the same historical event such as Pearl Harbor and the loyalty questionnaire ensures that one postulation does not outweigh or devalue other assumptions in the transmission of historical meanings. It also sustains the exegetical maneuvers in a way that mirror the union of historical reality and artistic speculation. Thus, as stated by Pedri, it implicates readers in extratextual "authenticity" or "experiences" as "sources of information" (*Factual* 12). In his depiction of extra-textual devices, Zavarzadeh classifies "references" into "elemental and figurational." The former encompasses original sources of historic accounts of an experiential world outside the text. Conversely, the latter is self-referent and self-contained engaging "total circumstantiality, internal believability and specificity" (Zavarzadeh 58). They create a sense of verisimilitude making use of overt fictional signals of "interpretative maneuvers that put into play different ways of understanding the same facts" (Pedri, *Factual* 31).

On his part, Suzuki underscores extra-textual sources in his introduction to *Treadmill*. He states, "Hiroshi Nakamura, along with his family, spent the war years in Salinas Assembly Center, Salinas, California; I Camp II of the Poston Relocation Center, Parker, Arizona; and Tule Lake Segregation Center, Newell, California." He further elucidates, "It was during this period that he put down on paper what he was observing, experiencing, and hearing, and expressed them in a novel" (i). This quote creates a level of dialogism between the text and the reader who becomes a part of a cogent debate open for varied appraisals, analyses and contextualization, and as James Young states, "resist "hasty ideological closure" (50). Lurking beneath such dialogism is a double voice: Pedri explains, "one that tells or shows and one that comments on the possible ways to understand what is told or shown" (*Factual* 31). The author manipulates such voices in order to deepen the historical records and to incite the reader into going beyond the factual space to think of its extra didactic association with internment traumatic experiences on both the "elemental" and "figurational" referential levels.

The "documentary novel," as an oxymoronic hybrid subtitle of *Treadmill*, echoes Nakamura's frictional responsibilities on the aforementioned referential levels: as a firsthand objective witness who

embarks on laying bare the truth about the traumatic confinement and in the process he uses miscellaneous resources and his imagination to weave a tantalizing tale. In this regard, Genette suggests that "a fictional text declares itself to be such by paratextual marks that protect the reader from any misunderstanding" (79). The generic indication "documentary novel" on title page and cover of the text is one example of paratexts that pulls the readers in contradictory directions towards the documentary and the fictional. Others include the preface, the introduction, lines on the flaps, foreword and afterword. Paratextual devices are essential in sustaining the documentary ambiance of faithfulness apropos the empirical course of events. In her discussion of documentary strategies, Jonas Ingvarsson underscores the substantiality of the preface to preserve a demarcation between the historical novel and what Rolf Yrlið calls the "pseudodocumentary" (81). Such a mode of narration resembles Mine Okubo in *Citizen 13660*.

#### **Traumatic Afflictions of Internment:**

Shoshana Felman contends that traditional theories of history tend to neglect traumatized subjects, keep their trauma out of record and deprive them of vocalizing their victimization (33) and thus they remain "the bearers of the silence" (7). In *Treadmill*, the morbid surrounding of camp community instills fear in them. Nakamura's narrative undertakes to give voice to the persecuted uncovering the secrets about the physical and psychological tribulations and the environmental eroding impact that Suzuki labels as "desertification," combined with the deceptive mercifulness of the American officials. In this manner, Nakamura "makes it possible to see, know, and feel the details of life and its styles in different places and to feel oneself part of another's experiences" (Susman 229) rendering the internees' private traumatizing experience into a collective national one.

Indeed, camp life and enforced dislocation of Japanese Americans leaving their homes, and losing their livelihoods, possessions and schools evoke traumatic psychological injuries. Internees are overwhelmed by emotions of utter helplessness, anxieties, cynicisms, and sense of fragmentation. Such slashing feelings inscribe an "image deeply within one's psyche precisely to the extent that it alienates the subject from any comprehension of the material underpinnings of the transpired event" (Roxworthy 4). Kiyota Minoru, a witness who was sent to the Tule Lake Segregation Center in 1943, remarks that the psychic trauma "of an individual who is subjected to government-sponsored harassment and injustice" (247) cannot be adequately conveyed.

In his testament of the officials' undertakings to expel the Japanese Americans out of their possessions and take over their property, George remarks "One fellow came over the other day and offered us \$5,000 for all



our holdings. He knows darn well our equipment alone is worth \$20,000 cold cash” (14). Obviously, this American ‘fellow’ is sure the Japanese Americans would not be allowed to keep their properties much longer. Yet, the psychic torture Japanese American suffered has been inconsequential for the American government that issued Freeze Order (1941) to freeze all the Japanese assets. The narrator discusses Freeze Order implicitly referring to the Noguchis who “had their assets in cash. When they left their home behind them ... [they] would have practically nothing” (26). The loss of the possessions is followed by the bereavement of the father which augments the psychological trauma. Portraying the Noguchis’ tearful parting with the father, the narrator remarks,

The shiny black car disappeared [with the father] and suddenly Mrs. Noguchi was sobbing softly in her *daughter's arms*.... *Teru's eyes blindly followed the road . She kept seeing the look in her father's eyes ... to a last farewell. The pleading look on them. Take care of the mother they seemed to say. ... She needs protection. Tears welled Teru's eyes. (10, emphasis mine)*

The quote is expressive and loaded with meaning. Forcible parting is emotionally harrowing and tormenting, and seems intolerable for the family. The Noguchis feel insecure and apprehensive as a result of the father’s internment. Teru declares, “It wouldn’t be so good if we left now without knowing where father is being taken. We won’t know where he is and he wouldn’t know where we went. We’d be so uncertain about everything and we wouldn’t know for how long” (16-17). Also, if they are forced to move out of their home to ‘relocation’ camps, Mr. Noguchi will be in the dark and will never be able to know where they are.

With the loss of her home and the arrest and internment of her husband without trials, Ayame Noguchi is overtaken by mental depletion and driven to the verge of insanity. As a result, she is unable to take care of herself or her children and withdraws into the cocoon of “her own mind” succumbing to “the Sisyphean (or more precisely, treadmillian) task of internment life” (Fickle, *Serious* 403). Like a treadmill, she is caught in the endless, interminable and unavailing labor. This sense of futility reflects the Japanese American feelings of purposelessness of labor and farm ownership since they failed to protect them from exclusion, marginalization and the virulence of US racism (Wald 87). A fellow internee remarks, “Look, we talk American. We act American. We are Americans. It’d be strange if we weren’t, after being exposed to it all these years in school and at work” (51). It is the pervading sense that they will never be assimilated into the mainstream of American society.

The debasement of Japanese ancestry disclosed more about psychological woes. The narrator reveals that when Teru comes unexpectedly on a group, “conversation would stop suddenly and an awkward pause would follow” to surround her with antagonistic stares and

“veiled hostility” (23). Linking her with Japan, Teru’s colleagues were leery and distrustful, so they avoid discussing or mentioning war in her presence. She was Attempting to attenuate her psychological agony, she persuades herself into believing in the justice of America saying “I must be an American.” Her parents “must feel the same” having “come to America as a land of promise” and settled “to make this their permanent home” (24).

Not only do the feelings of apprehension torment Teru and her mother; they also add to the dejection of Mr. Noguchi. The narrator succinctly highlights Mr. Noguchi’s psychological ordeal, “Being interned himself without trial or evidence, [Mr. Noguchi] more forcibly realized that innocence or good intentions meant nothing. Japanese ancestry was the stumbling block. Having Japanese ancestry singled them out for discriminatory treatment” (171). Noguchi challenges allegations of classifying Americans of Japanese ancestry as “bestial, treacherous, inhuman, yellow monkey” (171) to vindicate their incarceration without trials. In a revealing statement, the narrator points out, “It’s quite confusing ... People picked up, [Examples are Mr. Yamada, Mr. Mastsuda and Mr. Kataoka], were innocent of any kind of subversive activity” (30) and needed to surrender to the disillusionment about America. They are helpless victims of fanaticism and “racial propaganda directed against Japanese blood” (171).

Blatantly, race is the diving line “Japanese ancestry is tainted for the present American taste”(172), whereas, as argued by the narrator, “A German-American or Canadian-American is acceptable anywhere in Congress in Cabinet offices as President” (172). American citizenship thus implies nothing since color gave Japanese Americans away with scars that are so deep that they may take two generations to erase and will separate Japan and America “for a long time after the war” (171).

The magnitude of the psychological agony is alarming: the imprisoned internees panic because they have wives and children they should be looking after. Furthermore, they are held in incarceration “without having done any wrong or even being suspected of having done any wrong” (208). Teru declares, “We’re not even allowed the right to live.” She cites the instance of a man “shot and killed by the sentry” and a biased verdict got him off free. She is inconsolable, “That kind of trial is worse than having none at all” (208). Such subjugating policies cause a rift in her bond on familial and communal levels. Teru documents an inhumanly callous attitude, “We’re not even allowed to visit our next-door neighbors. During the day, we can’t be seen together with more than three other people” (207).

For the internees, the enormity of trauma is not only on the psychological level; it extends to the physical scale. Incongruously, the narrator explains that the “government was intending to take care of

[Japanese Americans] with nice prefabricated houses and all the facilities of an average home” (19) in which they will have everything such as “Movies, stores, beauty shops” (19). However, the appalling physical conditions in Poston, Salinas and Tule Lake camps, which lack the bare human necessities, invalidate such proclamations. Camps are reported to be ceilingless, framework uncovered, where “Plates of stew were laid out on the long tables.” A waitress whispered, “I don’t feel so good watching these people ... some are almost dying at the hospital” (70). A ghastly and dreary scene in Poston made the first two months “seem like part of another existence” (90). Tule Lake was much worse. The narrator depicts it as bleak, “The whole countryside appeared broken down and abandoned looking” (193). Suzuki maintains that it is shockingly drab: “It is the largest of ten camps, with populations of 18,000, and unkempt in appearance. The dreary camp, moreover, is the theatre of even more violence and mayhem than experienced at Poston” (Desertification 471).

The testimony of Ted Kanaka, one of the internees, divulges more about the derelict conditions in camps. He recalls ironically: “We were still a very close family, and we had to be...because we were all in one 20 by 20 foot room and we ate in mess halls. We had no running water or toilet facilities in the rooms—we had to go to a common toilet, and shower and things like that in this common area” (qtd. in Gesensway and Roseman 44). The narrator further illustrates, “Water in the camps may be contaminated (33) ... The walls echoed and throbbed with the clatter of dishes, the wail of babies, the chatter of children, the loudness of youth, the scolding hurt of their elders trying to quiet them” (74).

The extreme harsh weather conditions that pervade camp life aggravated the internees’ physical trauma in their vulnerability. Dismal and barren landscape of the camps punishes the families and causes them to physically “wilt” in the heat as their belief in America “wither[s].” They were obviously “placed out in the sun simply to shrivel away” (76). Commenting on the oppressive atmosphere, Gesensway and Roseman write, “The ten relocation camps were built in deserts and swamps, in desolate and hostile areas of the United States known for their extreme weather conditions”(44). Teru confirms that weather was so hot that sweat dripped from faces into bowls. It also exuded from pores so continuously. Hence, Japanese American internees gave up trying to keep their faces dry while eating. On his part, the narrator concisely sums up the impact of environmental desertification with an expressive comment, “There was a deserted look about everything” (200).

Unequivocally, the ‘desertified’ cruelty of camp environment contrasts with the narrator’s opening statements of the lush greenish landscape of Japanese American topography. The narrator reflects on the extent to which the environment affects the physical physiognomy of Teru: “The afternoon sun picked out coppery tinges in the dark black hair which

curled softly away from her face and ended in glossy curls at the back of her head. Her stride was free and her head was carried with a buoyant lift”(2). The incarceration policies of the officials thus managed to dissipate the harmony and rapport that existed between the Japanese-Americans and their natural environment.

Encountering the tribulation of such an unruly atmosphere, the internees are physiologically and physically devastated. In their feebleness, they exhort God to listen to their lamentations. Teru prays in supplication, “Dear God, what have I ever done to deserve all this? This dust, this heat, these dirty barracks, this futureless life! What did I do? What have I done? (75).” In a letter to George, Teru writes, “I didn’t know God’s world held such a place. This is Hell. Even the wind has a hellish howl tonight” (78). In the reminiscences of the Japanese American, the traumatic impact of the ecological conditions of the camps weighs heavily on their minds and souls. Fickle professes, “The physical exhaustion ... epitomizes the inmates’ constant struggle to survive ... to scrounge up food, ward off the bitter cold, and run through blinding dust storms ... in search of basic human comforts like toilet paper or a broom” (Dilemma 753).

To underpin the grisly environment of the camps and the iniquitous policies of the officials, Nakamura resorts to prototexts and allusions to corresponding versions of camp experiences of the Jews and the Indians. In *Treadmill*, Ted Kanaka’s testimony calls into question allegations about providing for Jews all amenities and comfort. She states that camps are “horrible places where the Germans were said to have tortured and mistreated people who refused to conform to the New Order or were simply of Jewish ancestry” (20). Contrary to a situation in which thousands of Jews, according to Mark Weber, committed countless crimes throughout Europe before the Germans began their general evacuation, the Japanese were incarcerated on grounds of suspicion of what they might do (56). The narrator remarks that camp experience is especially excruciating for all especially the older internees who “crouched despondently on the floor, sick and tired and not shamed into caring about appearances” (77).

American Indians, like Japanese Americans, were consigned to reservations, subjected to internment and denied full citizenship rights. Armed guards supervised their detention. Moreover, they were obliged to get a permit from a federal Indian agent or military to “leave their assigned agencies” (Saito 185). Empirical evidences attest to several cases of death. In *Treadmill*, The narrator reports a gloomy scene; in internment, “James Kido died two days ago... Saburo Miyake... died of the measles.” The internees are “afraid to get sick.” The analogy with Indian reservation is conspicuous. The Indians tell the internees that when that reservation was first filled, “over half of the total number of Indians who were earmarked

for this reservation died either on the march here or within the first months after arriving” (79).

### **Strategies of Authentications:**

In their study, Bucholtz and Hall identify authentication as “the agentive process whereby claims to realness are asserted” (498). Nakamura utilizes an assortment of devices to verify his reliability as a witness to the traumatic afflictions of internment experience; namely, artistic construction of events through chronological sequence associated with historic dates, interpolated documentation of empirical issues, a multitude of eye and ear witnesses, as well as letters and names of real persons. Not only does Nakamura uses such documentary techniques to validate its veracity, but also to blur the boundaries between historic correspondences and Japanese American private recollections, or as Izganjalechudiča puts it, between the “truths of political manifestos, historical records, and memoirs” (qtd. in Flis, Documentary 40). In this regard, Daniel Lehman notes, “it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish the narrative of one's own memory from what is mediated or constructed by others” (24).

Treating historic dates, Nakamura complies with the actual objective movement of time as it unfolds in the physical world. Yet, it is never identical with real time, but at the same time it abstains from deviations that turn them into pure fictional realms. The temporal organization of events, as Flis explains, is “based on objective and subjective time. ... The first co-exists with the universe, we have no influence upon it, the latter is temporal passage as it is experienced by humans on daily basis” (*Factual* 148). Perceptibly, at the end of each chapter, the progression of time in terms of hours, days, weeks, months and years begins to blur in flowing into the rhythm of the succeeding chapter. Moreover, it gradually produces the effect of eternal sameness mentioned in the various digressions on time.

Suzuki's introduction to *Treadmill* underscores Nakamura's painstaking deployment of historic events. He states that it “opens in April 1942, when ‘relocation’ to the camps looms large with Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 that ordered the evacuation of the Japanese Americans” (ii). The narrator broaches other historic dates to enhance the effect of the text's authenticity. Examples include January 5, 1942 and January 29, 1942 Orders according to which all Japanese American selective service registrants are reclassified as “enemy aliens.” Accordingly, they have to be excluded from what Attorney General Francis Biddle label as “prohibited zones;” or “certain strategic areas” (18). March Order was issued to include “Citizens who had Japanese fathers or mothers. But citizens of German and Italian extraction had not been touched” (18). In 1937, “U. S. Army planes drafted ... for evacuation of all Japanese from the Pacific coast regardless of citizenship. ... in 48 hours, if necessary” (19). For this reason, Japan thus becomes their final refuge.

Nakamura imparts cogency to letters as another substantial technique to mirror factual scenes about Japanese American life within and outside the camps. The reader has to go beyond their confines using the details contained within them and assembling evidences that authenticate the accounts. Nakamura links this epistolary device to the historic incident of Pearl Harbor. In a letter to Sally, Teru professes, "Before Pearl Harbor Bombing I got a letter from a girl who came back to America on the same ship as I did. She came back because she hated the country ... She wrote later that she made a mistake in coming back to America" (137). This letter unveils how evacuation is a watershed in the life of the Japanese Americans. Noguchi accentuates such a fact in his flashback of a letter from a former colleague. He writes, "Why America of all nations should have voted against and had been instrumental in defeating a racial and religious equality clause in the Covenant of the League of Nations" (172). Obviously, the two letters unmask the American bigoted policies and hollowness of egalitarian slogans that max out after evacuation.

Intertwining 'elemental and figurational' references, Nakamura utilizes letters functionally in factual and romantic/ fictive accounts. Early in the novel, the narrator unveils Teru's admiration of George in her letter. He comments, "George's hand quickly found hers ... and Teru felt warm and relaxed ... It was good to be alive... The skies were clear and the moon would be coming out tonight" (22). This romantic scene offers a possible discovery of an auspicious world of hope and solidarity that counters the intimidating coercive milieu of the camps. Later in the novel, the narrator further elaborates on this issue, "[Teru] wished she could write, I like you, George ...I felt flattered and loved when you looked at me ... I wait so eagerly to see his face each morning... The sight of him is even better than I'd pictured over the weekend" (91). The exchange of passionate written letters between George and Teru reflecting love relationship could have garnered a controlling appeal in the narrative. Other examples of love letters include Alice and Pete, and Sally and Bill.

Contrary to Teru's romantic letters, George's letters are suffused with the repercussions of the historic events and the predicament of the Japanese American. He writes: "The Army order forbidding us to leave California! came as a surprise because our land owner kept assuring us up to the last minute that he had the word of high authorities that we wouldn't be evacuated" (90). He further debates that Japanese Americans were practically promised that they "wouldn't be asked to move again convinces me that even the first mass evacuation can be laid to political demagoguery of the worst kind. I wouldn't be surprised now if the next move was the imprisonment of all Japanese in America" (90). Internment is not shocking for George, the same way like Teru, since he expects it. Noticeably, all

romantic relations have been shattered and fleetingly treated due to the traumatic afflictions and the prominence of Nakamura's documentary inclination.

Modeling characters on real people is instrumental in further validating the documentation presented in the narrative. Characters represent real individuals Nakamura had known, encountered, or heard about. Teru, is a typical example: she impersonates Nakamura's younger sister as argued by his widow. Mr. Noguchi mirrors Hiroshi Nakamura himself and both were arrested by the FBI and were incarcerated in Bismarck, North Dakota. In this manner, Nakamura accentuates the intersection between fact and fiction confirming to the reader that the narrative, likewise, real life embraces so many potential interpretations that one simply cannot grasp or pursue them all.

#### **Problematic Closure:**

Problematizing the closure is one of the distinguishing traits that characterizes the documentary novel. It seems that the author himself is unable to offer a hasty conclusive ending. Instead he presents an open-endedness which informs the body of the narrative just like life itself. Documentary texts as nonfiction encounter a difficulty in inserting a closure into the narrative texture that depicts experiential reality. In concluding *Treadmill* with Teru's letters to her sister about the family's intermingled feelings of uncertainty, the closure is rendered enigmatic for the reader. The reader's quandary resonates Teru's which Suzuki expounds "Teru, torn between loyalty to her family and loyalty to her native America, in a no-win situation, can only hope that things will turn better for their lot in postwar Japan and for Sally and her lot in postwar America" (Premier 179-80).

*Treadmill* concludes after Japan has surrendered which implicitly signaling the acquiescence of the Noguchis as representatives of the Issie, and Teru and Tad moving on their way from Tule Lake to Japan. After baring factual historic incidents within a fictive framework, Nakamura uses chapter twenty one to exemplify the essence of *Treadmill* as expressed in the narrator's following poignant words,

The barbed wire ... made wishful thinking impossible. ... Goodbye, America ... Follow your heart and no people can dictate a facade of greed, intolerance, or bigotry. I love you still even though you failed me .... I only wish there might have been slightest justification for mass evacuation. If, fearing invasion, you could have taken just our men, leaving our women and children carry on .... You could have written bright pages .... You need never have left *history that will look better tossed over in your records....* why don't we let the seekers of power and glory fight their own battles and know themselves the utter futility of dying and killing? ... The hope of this century is a shining example that all people can live

together in harmony and tolerance....comfort and happiness.  
(205)

Though somber in tone, the articulation of thoughts and feelings in above-mentioned quote is highly evocative in many respects. First and foremost, the words tersely recapitulate the ludic truth and the officials' mischievousness and playfulness in relation to the Japanese American camp trauma. They designate in pictorial ways terms that have been repeatedly and contradictorily used to identify the imprisonment centers such as "the barbed wire," "fencing" and "gun towers." The utterances proclaim the falsity of constructs professed to be for the good and protection of the internees. In reality, they are degrading and debasing. Innocent individuals are incarcerated in castles in wildlife under armed guards. Moreover, deploying multiple viewpoints, the narrator uses first, second and third pronouns, speaking in "I," "you" and "she" to dissuade the reader into a cogent argument about the deceit involved in such innocuous terms. Yet, the second person point of view addresses America not the reader since it failed the aspirations of the Noguchis as well as the Asians on grounds of racial discrimination.

Despite their disillusionment, the Japanese Americans are adamant in keeping their dreams alive and directing their hopes towards achieving a reconstruction and a rereading of the official history. They challenge traditional historiography that tends to explain events with a definite knowable conclusion swayed as Tomasz Wiślicz writes, by "bias, self-interest and a tendency to simplify things and ignore inconvenient information" (9). Instead, they advocate a historic documentation that is open to re-examination and revision, and maintains a dialogue between the past and the present. Readers come to realize the truth of the 'fictual' world by considering and incorporating varied interpretations and imaginings.

Definitely, *Treadmill* assumes wider dimensions with the intent on globalizing it as "the hope of the century" to raise the consciousness to live in peace and tolerance discarding all kinds of division, separation and animosity on grounds of racial difference. This echoes the "spirit of indomitability [that] pervades [*Treadmill*]" (xiii). Although this does not concur with the context and content of the narrative, the narrator's words conjure up Cyril Fielding's response in *A Passage to India* that "the world is a globe of men who are trying to reach one another and can best do so by the help of good will plus culture and intelligence" (Forster 80).

#### **Conclusion:**

In *Treadmill*, Nakamura utilizes the narrative strategies and aesthetics ploys of the documentary novel to articulate the experience of reality. The documentary setting suggests multiple modes of critical



interpretations, and readings of truth claims as contingent and provisional. By reworking reality and, in the process, deconstructing the official historiographical discourse, it necessitates a critical reading transcending traditional boundaries. Significantly, *Treadmill* re-appropriates the strict epistemological referential world of absolute truth into the inconclusive realm of fictional truth.

Along the course of the narrative, armed with the devices of narratology such as story, polyphony and spatio-temporal dimensions, Nakamura synthesizes facts in a fictive framework to penetrate the veneer of American ideals and reveal occulted truths about Japanese American Camp trauma. Therefore, he embarks upon “the 'interior world' of history while maintaining a novelistic pose” (Karl 582). In this way, the reality presented encompasses the temporal duality of past and present experience as well as the commonplace information and the obscured facts.

In view of that, Nakamura may be labeled as a “revisionist historian” (Pemberton 213) whose narration goes beyond the confines of a readerly text that reports historical data of a ‘fixed and unchangeable’ nature to a passive reader. *Treadmill*, as a writerly text, works with material that is wide-open for new interpretations by an interactive reader. In his hands, epistemological historic claims of official truth assuming accurate transcription of experiential events turn into an ontological process of construing and inferring. He chronicles a provisional construct in light of empirical events.

Furthermore, Nakamura resorts to varying strategies to authenticate his testimonial material. With the implementation of multitudes of witnesses, ultimate truth recedes, giving rise to inconclusive truth that originated in the numerous interpretations. In fact, *Treadmill* provides an insight into the physical and psychic traumatic impact of mass evacuation and internment camp life suffered for decades by Japanese and Japanese Americans.

#### Notes:

- (1) Several prominent theorists discussed an aesthetic approach to documentary novels; namely, Truman Capote and E. L. Doctorow, Barbara Foley, Leonora Flis, Lars Ole Sauerberg, Hayden White, Norman Mailer, John Berendt, Don DeLillo and Elena Poniatowska.
- (2) Grand narratives is a coinage of Jean François Lyotard signifying the subjugation of the marginalized discourses (narratives) by the mainstream or master dominant ones.
- (3) Kibei: Japanese American born in America and returned to USA after receiving their education in Japan.
- (4) In Barthes’ schema, the goal of the literary text is to “make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text” (S/Z In such writerly texts, the reader is a serious participant in the production of the text with the power to reject or accept. It is contrary to the ‘readerly text’ pledged to uphold

- “a particular system of meaning” (S/Z 7) and the reader is bound to accept the meaning as predetermined.
- (5) Ludology: a term derived from the Latin word ludus denoting game, and introduced by Gonzalo Frasca .
- (6) Double Consciousness is a term coined by W. E. B. Du Bois denoting the division of the identity into multiple facets.

## الملخص

الرواية الوثائقية: قراءة نقدية لمعسكرات الاعتقال اليابانية الأمريكية في رواية  
"الطاحونة" لهيروشي ناكامورا  
محمود إبراهيم إبراهيم رضوان

يمثل هيروشي ناكامورا أحد الأمريكيين الذين تم اعتقالهم في معسكرات الاعتقال الأمريكية لليابانيين ، وذلك أثناء الحرب العالمية الثانية، وقد جسد ناكامورا تجربة الاعتقال المريرة في روايته الطاحونة: "رواية وثائقية".

تتناول الدراسة قراءة نقدية لهذه الرواية في ضوء التنظير المتنوع للروايات الوثائقية. وتمثل هذه الرواية شهادة تفصيلية معبرة على الألام النفسية والجسدية التي امت بالأمريكيين اليابانيين ، واليابانيين في معسكرات الاعتقال. وعلى الرغم من تفرد هذه الرواية في العديد من الجوانب ؛ فلم يلقَ هذا النص من الرؤى النقدية ما يستحقه. وبحسب للرواية السبق والريادة كونها أول رواية تم تأليفها أثناء فترة اعتقال اليابانيين والأمريكيين اليابانيين، ومكنت هذه الرواية ما يقرب من خمسين عامًا على أحد أرفف سجلات الأرشيف الوطني الأمريكي، وقد استطاع ناكامورا توظيف أدوات الرواية الوثائقية بكفاءة جعلته قادرًا على التحرر من قيود التأويل التقليدي ذي النظرة الأحادية للحقائق التاريخية، ومما يدل على ذلك عرض ناكامورا الحقائق التاريخية من خلال إطار روائي، حيث قدم للقارئ الحقائق التاريخية من خلال وجهات نظر مختلفة ؛ مما أدى إلى إنتاج الكثير من التأويلات لنفس الحقائق التاريخية.

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